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NAXOS

DEQING WEN

Shanghai Prelude

The Fantasia of Peony Pavilion

Variation of a Rose

Nostalgia

Love Song and River Chant

Bruno Weinmeister, Cello

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra

Gottfried Rabl

Deqing Wen (b. 1958): Shanghai Prelude

The Fantasia of Peony Pavilion • Variation of a Rose • Nostalgia • Love Song and River Chant

Deqing Wen (b. 1958) is a Chinese-Swiss composer, a professor of Composition at Shanghai Conservatory of Music, and a member of the Société Suisse pour les Droits des Auteurs d'Oeuvres. He is the Artistic Director of Shanghai Conservatory's New Music Week, and features in *Who's Who in the World of Music*, produced by Cambridge Biographic Centre. Wen studied at Fujian Normal University with Guo Zu-Rong; the China Conservatory of Music with Shi Wan-Chun and Luo Zhong-Rong; the Conservatoire de Musique de Genève with Jean Balisaat; and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Musique de Lyon with Gilbert Amy. He was also a visiting scholar at Columbia University.

Wen's works have won him international acclaim, and combine an original musical approach with the influences of Chinese traditional arts and philosophy. His vivid, emotive and accessible style has been praised by critics in China and Europe. Zhou Haihong of the Central Conservatory of Music (Beijing) has described it as striking 'a balance between complexity and clarity, between mystery and rationality, between shock and subtlety, between fantasy and rigour, and between exactness and profundity'. The *Salzburger Nachrichten*, reporting on a performance in 1999, remarked that 'Wen's music is so fresh, like morning dew; as exciting as a detective story and as enjoyable as an evening with the best of friends.'

His works have been performed at a variety of venues including the Festival Archipel, Festival Amadeus and the Davos Festival in Switzerland; Vienna Modern; ISCM World Contemporary Music Festival; Darmstadt Summer Course and Wittener Tage für neue Kammermusik in Germany; Savolinna Opera Festival in Finland; the Asian Composers League Festival in Japan and Australia; the Hong Kong Arts Festival; and festivals in Taipei, Beijing and Shanghai. Wen has been honoured with concerts and masterclasses dedicated to his compositions in China, Switzerland, France, Denmark, Germany, Israel and the USA. His music has been published by Swiss Musical

Edition, Bärenreiter Verlag, the Shanghai Conservatory of Music Press and the Beijing People's Music Publishing House, and albums of his compositions have been released on a wide variety of labels.

Wen has been awarded the Prize of the State of Geneva 1993, the Prix du Festival of the 3rd Festival de Musique des Châteaux Neuchâtelois, the Prix Cultura 1999 of the Foundation Kiwanis and the Composer Prize 2001 of the Foundation Leenaards of Switzerland.

Composer's note

This collection of orchestral works begins with *Shanghai Prelude*, composed in 2015. In an attempt to reflect the cosmopolitan nature of Shanghai itself – not least its blend of oriental and occidental cultures – I have chosen a single musical phrase from which I have extracted both Chinese traditional models and patterns redolent of the European Baroque style. This phrase is drawn from *Pingtian* music (a narrative musical form), from the story of *Du Shiniang*, a tale of tragic love between a courtesan and a young student. Within the rich orchestral texture, a solo cello provides a sense of developing musical narrative from which Chinese melodic fragments and concerto grosso-like passages emerge. I also explore a range of instrumental colours, separating orchestral sections and using changing tempos and moods to characterize my material.

The Fantasia of Peony Pavilion (2013) takes its name from a work by the Ming Dynasty playwright Tang Xianzu (1550-1616) entitled *The Peony Pavilion*. This work holds particular significance within the development of Chinese drama (and by extension opera, most commonly as a *Kun* opera), as the main characters are rebels against traditional feudal ethics. Its subject matter deals with the pursuit of love through dreams, and even death must be overcome in order for the central couple to be united. The composition draws on the pitch material of both the *Kun* opera or *Kunqu* – one of China's oldest forms of opera,



an oral tradition – and elements of *Lougu Jing*, a traditional means of notating percussion through conventional Chinese speech characters. The work is intended as a drawing together of themes from the play, which fall into a series of mirror images – heaven and hell, man and ghost, love and lust, dreams and reality, triumph and disaster – and was also written to pay respect to Tang Xianzu and his legacy.

Variation of a Rose, composed in 2000, is a work born out of personal hardship and sadness for me. The theme on which the variations are written is a folksong from Xinjiang province in northwest China, *A lovable Rose*. This simple, melancholy melody prompts a slow orchestral unfolding in waves over the course of the piece. The gentle string writing of the opening builds in intensity and is joined by other instruments until the tension ebbs away into a quiet passage for winds; this, in its turn grows and recedes, and is followed by new dips and swells, until the work's final quiet resolution.

Just as Wang Wei, a great Chinese poet of the Tang Dynasty, says in his poem, one misses one's family more than ever when one is far away from home on a festive day. This poem is a reflection of my life when I was living far from home in a foreign country. But when I return to my homeland, I can't help but miss my foreign friends on festive days, those who were as kind to me and acted as a family would. *Nostalgia* (2014), a set of orchestral variations on the French folksong *À la claire fontaine*, was composed as an affectionate greeting to my French-speaking friends and colleagues on the day of the Moon Festival, in the early autumn.

The final work on this recording, *Love Song and River Chant*, is based on a piano work completed in New York in 2006, which I subsequently orchestrated in 2010. The piece emerged from the problem of trying to work creatively within the pentatonic scale, a five-note mode which is fundamental to much Chinese music, and which I sought to include in my music without allowing it to dominate the musical structure.

Love Song is a set of variations on the Suiyan (north Chinese) folksong *The Path*. The lyrics reflect the difficulties of maintaining dignity and avoiding social taboos whilst courting: 'Baby, don't take the road in front of the house. Please walk around and down the path at the back.' The conflict between desire and tradition is picked up in my setting, in which ascending gestures and growing crescendos are placed in sharp contrast to the descending, somewhat desperate folk melody – the orchestra fights back against the confines of the traditional. At the close of the movement, the oboe and cor anglais exchange echoes of the theme: the lovers, with great reluctance, must finally part.

This leads directly into the second part, *River Chant*, which is an entirely original composition, an imitation of a southern Chinese song. River chants were sung by Chinese boatmen to boost morale and draw strength from each other as they pulled large ships up along steep river courses. The sheer energy and determination needed for this task is captured in the intensity and power of the orchestral writing – the music builds towards its climax, the voices of the instruments joined by the shouts and cries of the performers themselves, exhausted from their musical journey upstream.

Deqing Wen

Bruno Weinmeister



Bruno Weinmeister has been acknowledged internationally as an extraordinarily gifted musician. He performed to great acclaim at the Eurovision concert organised by the Musikalische Jugend Österreichs, and has appeared with major orchestras throughout Europe including the Deutsche Sinfonieorchester Berlin, the Museumorchester Frankfurt, the Mozarteum Orchester Salzburg, the Stuttgart Kammerorchester, the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra, the Orchestra Sinfonica Nazionale della RAI, the Copenhagen Philharmonic Orchestra, the MDR-Kammerphilharmonie and the Vienna Kammerorchester, among others. In 1993 he performed Friedrich

Gulda's *Cello Concerto* with the NDR Sinfonieorchester under the direction of Gulda himself. His engagements have also included performances of Schumann with Leopold Hager, Brahms' *Double Concerto* with the Swiss Youth Orchestra in Lucerne, Zurich and Bern, Sofia Gubaidulina's *Seven Words* at the Brucknerfest in Linz, Austria, and Lutoslawski's *Cello Concerto* in various German music centres. Weinmeister has appeared at the Lockenhaus Festival, the Berlin Festival, and with the Winterthur Orchestra in Switzerland. In addition to his orchestral appearances, he has performed chamber music with his violinist sister Anna, among others.

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra



Photo: Thomas Ramstorfer. The ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra was formed in 1969 from the main orchestra of Austrian Radio. Under the leadership of its chief conductors Milan Horvat, Leif Segerstam, Lothar Zagrosek, Pinchas Steinberg, Dennis Russell Davies, and Bertrand de Billy, the orchestra has continuously expanded its repertoire amid growing international renown, and has been led by its principal conductor and artistic director Cornelius Meister since 2010. All of the orchestra's performances are broadcast, particularly on Österreich 1, but also internationally. The orchestra regularly performs in two subscription series at the Vienna Musikverein and Konzerthaus, with a recent significant increase in the number of subscribers. In addition, the RSO appears annually at major Austrian and international festivals. The orchestra has close ties to the Salzburg Festival, the Wiener Festwochen, Wien Modern, and *musikprotokoll im steierischen herbst*, which provides a platform for the performance of new and experimental music. Tours to Japan and China are also a regular part of the RSO schedule and there have been concert tours to the United States and South America. Since 2007 the orchestra has successfully collaborated with the Theater an der Wien, thereby gaining an excellent reputation as an opera orchestra. They have performed with distinguished conductors, composers and soloists and have made a series of successful recordings.

Gottfried Rabl



Born in Vienna, Gottfried Rabl studied piano and holds degrees in French horn, conducting and vocal coaching from the Vienna University of Music. He was awarded a conducting fellowship in Helsinki and led his own highly successful ensemble for avant-garde music, *Theatre of Silence*, for several years, appearing as conductor, pianist and composer. He later started a close collaboration with Leonard Bernstein in Vienna, Milan and the United States, serving as musical assistant and editor of Bernstein's last opera *A Quiet Place*. He subsequently pursued, for several years, post-graduate studies at the Indiana University School of Music in the United States, where he became conductor of the local symphony orchestra. In Vienna Gottfried Rabl is a frequent conductor of the Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra and works regularly with the renowned contemporary music ensemble *die reihe*. Internationally he has worked with a number of orchestras and recorded for BMG-Ariola and the German labels Orfeo and cpo as well as Sony Classical, with acclaimed recordings including all nine symphonies by Egon Wellesz for cpo. The first two CDs received enthusiastic reviews in Europe as well as in the United States and were nominated for a GRAMMY® Award and, at MIDEM, for the best recording of a twentieth-century composition.



Deeply influenced by Chinese traditional arts and philosophy, Deqing Wen composes in a style that is vivid, emotive and accessible. In the Cello Concerto *Shanghai Prelude* he blends traditional Chinese music with elements of European Baroque style, while *The Fantasia of Peony Pavilion* draws on *Kunqu*, one of China's oldest forms of opera. The graceful melancholy of *Nostalgia* is balanced by the intensity and power of *Love Song and River Chant*.



DEQING WEN
(b. 1958)



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| 1 | Shanghai Prelude (2015)*
Concerto for Cello and Orchestra | 19:40 |
| 2 | The Fantasia of Peony Pavilion (2013)
for orchestra | 17:39 |
| 3 | Variation of a Rose (2000)
for orchestra | 15:19 |
| 4 | Nostalgia (2014)
Version for orchestra | 9:07 |
| 5 | Love Song and River Chant (2010)
Version for orchestra | 8:21 |

WORLD PREMIÈRE RECORDINGS

Bruno Weinmeister, Cello*

ORF Vienna Radio Symphony Orchestra
Gottfried Rabl

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and the Foundation of New Music

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